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In the deep south in Punta Gorda, residents are clamoring for assistance to ward off a health risk at the St. Peter Claver Primary School posed by its asbestos roof. The school was built decades ago and the building has been condemned by health authorities because its asbestos roof is deteriorating with the passage of time, making it a health hazard. Marion Ali visited the school today to find out how the problem is affecting the students and teachers.

Marion Ali, Reporting

This is how bad the asbestos situation was at Saint Peter Claver Roman Catholic Primary when we visited today – that is, one day after that same desk was wiped clean. Evidence of thick fibrous carcinogenic particles layered over the furniture in three of the buildings. It has caused skin and breathing problems among many of the children as the decades old buildings shed the material. Saint Peter Claver has been the venue where thousands of Toledo residents have received their elementary education. But the cancerous material has only become a problem, according to school Principal, Marion Nolberto, since it noticeably started to disintegrate about four years ago.

Marion Nolberto, Principal, St Peter Claver Primary



Marion Nolberto

“We started by moving some of the children from Infant two, that’s the building directly behind me, that’s the worst of the three buildings and we relocated them to the standard six building. The standard six then had to relocate into the Sam Daniels building but we were informed that that building is a CXC centre for students of Julian Cho from the said school as well as private candidates. So we decided then that we had to move out our children from there and unfortunately we had to place them back into one of the asbestos buildings for the

meantime. You can’t even put anything on it because it leaks heavily but if you try to climb up there you would just come right down. So these roofs are about to collapse anytime now.”

And that was what triggered the alarm. Concerned parents and teachers were reluctant to subject the children and themselves to the cancer-causing agent.

Omar Requeña, Std 6 teacher

“This has been a problem from a long time ago but no one has actually set foot on it and tried to

do something about it. Over the past couple months with this dry weather and now rain coming, the flakes of the roof is coming down and actually you can see the sediments on the floor and this real hazardous to our children so we can't go in there. "

Ray Martinez, Std 6 teacher, St Peter Claver Primary

"Definitely anything hazardous we're strictly against and I have it at heart as well that I cannot do such a thing to the thirty-six kids under my care."

Teacher, St Peter Claver Primary

"This morning the dust had all here burning me and everyday you can't leave your things. Look at dust."

There was dust lining everything in the classrooms which were cleaned on Monday. But while the health of the children is top priority, their education must also continue. And that is where the Church and the government must strike common ground. And Nolberto was unyielding with the demands he and the teachers are putting jointly on the Catholic management and the government.

Marion Nolberto

"If the stakeholders, the Ministry, the management, among others do not take our plan by the end of this week we will ask the children to stay home and not come back under this asbestos roofs."



The school has come up with an estimate for renovations to one of the buildings and there is a possibility that a company will donate another building. And while the Ministry of Education has promised two more buildings from Holy Ghost School in Dangriga as a temporary solution, whether the problem can be fixed in time for classes by next Monday is another concern.

Joseph Cayetano, Assistant Local Mgr, Toledo Catholic Schools

"We're trying to, we'll try all our best because come Monday we will have to be relocated from SB Daniels."

Marion Ali

"Do you foresee that classes will have to be suspended?"

Joseph Cayetano

"I hope not, I hope not. We'll try our utmost best that classes will not be suspended. However, if someone reneges on what they should be doing, whether it should be doing, whether it be government or management then we'll have to be faced with the closing down of the school."

As the saying goes, time is the best test of fate. We'll see on Monday. Marion Ali for News Five.

St Peter Claver has an enrolment of nine hundred and twenty students, but only three hundred and fifty seven are exposed to the asbestos problem. According to Advisor to the school, Fabian Cayetano, there is a five year plan to rebuild new concrete school

buildings. It will come at a cost of four point five million dollars and will be large enough to accommodate the growing school population. We'd like to thank Will Maheia of the People's National Party for providing some of the interviews and footage for this news item.

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